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ABSTRACT

To examine the forms that English instruction takes in programs identified as exemplary, a 2-year study was conducted of the working lives of four English/language arts teachers in two schools in Dade County, Florida. The four teachers and the two schools in which they work were identified as "exemplary" by national education leaders, state education officials, and local district leaders. Data were generated by attending the teachers' classes, audiotaping them, and taking copious field notes. Issues such as the following were explored: what the teachers' professional and personal networks were; where they got their ideas for lessons; whether and how they refined these ideas and adjusted them to the needs of their students; how they determined these students' individual needs; what they thought was important for their students to learn in English class; how they taught both literature and writing; how they prepared students for standardized tests; how they assessed, formally and informally, student work; how they interacted with colleagues; how they were affected by being in schools affiliated with the Coalition of Essential Schools; how they changed as educators over time; and where they thought they were going as educators. Findings suggest that the four teachers see it as their mandate to provide a rich array of literacy-related activities and experiences in their students--activities/experiences that revolve around wide reading, wide writing, expansive and prolonged thinking and problem solving, and ample opportunities for conversing about and presenting what they are learning to faculty as well as to one another. (Contains 13 references. An appendix describes participating schools.) (NKA)

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CELA RESEARCH REPORT

HOW ENGLISH IS TAUGHT AND LEARNED IN FOUR EXEMPLARY MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOMS

STEVEN OSTROWSKI

CELA CASE STUDY NUMBER 13002

NATIONAL RESEARCH CENTER ON

ENGLISH LEARNING & ACHIEVEMENT

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S. O.

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The Center on English Learning & Achievement (CELA) is a national research and development center located at the University of Albany, State University of New York, in collaboration with the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Additional research is conducted at the Universities of Georgia and Washington.

The Center, established in 1987, initially focused on the teaching and learning of literature. In March 1996, the Center expanded its focus to include the teaching and learning of English, both as a subject in its own right and as it is learned in other content areas. CELA's work is sponsored by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education, as part of the National Institute on Student Achievement, Curriculum, and Assessment.

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FOREWORD

The school doors you will open as you read this case study reveal very special places. Here students are actively involved in becoming highly literate; they are learning how language works in context and how to use it to advantage for academic purposes. Here, too, teachers are supported in their efforts to improve their teaching and to grow as professionals.

What makes this kind of environment possible? A team of field researchers and I have been exploring this question in a major five-year project for the National Research Center on English Learning & Achievement (CELA). This case study is one part of that project, which involves 25 English programs nationwide. Each is providing English instruction to middle and high school students. Most are exemplary; some are more typical and give us points of contrast. Overall our study examines the contexts that lead to thought-provoking learning in English classes and the professional contexts that support such learning. This case report offers portraits of four teachers within the contexts of both their schools and profession. We offer it to provide food for thought and a model for action for readers or groups of readers who wish to improve the English language arts learning of their own students.

The programs we are studying represent great diversity in student populations, educational problems, and approaches to improvement. The reports and case studies that comprise this project (listed on page 46) do not characterize programs as process-oriented, traditional, or interdisciplinary. Instead, they provide a conception of what "English" is as it is enacted in the classrooms of our best teachers, how these teachers have reconciled the various voices and trends within the professional community in their own practices, how their schools and districts support and encourage their efforts, and how in turn the contexts they create in their classrooms shape the high literacy learning of their students. The results have implications for curriculum, instruction, and assessment, as well as policy decisions, in English and the language arts.

In two cross-cutting reports, I have analyzed the data across all case studies for overarching patterns, identifying and discussing particular features of teachers' professional experiences that permeate these special programs as well as the features that characterize their instruction.

I am profoundly grateful for the cooperation and vision of the teachers and administrators who contributed their time and ideas so generously and so graciously to this project. It was indeed a privilege for the field researchers and me to enter into their worlds of learning – a place I now invite you to visit and learn from in the following pages.

Judith A. Langer
Director, CELA
July 2000

How English is Taught and Learned in Four Exemplary Middle and High School Classrooms

Steven Ostrowski

Introduction

What forms does English instruction take in programs that have been identified by multiple sources in the field of education as exemplary, and that have been recognized as places where extraordinary and positive educational events are taking place? In order to answer these and related questions, I followed closely and regularly for two years the working lives of four English/language arts teachers in two schools in Dade County, Florida. This research was part of a larger federally funded study, directed by Judith Langer of the National Research Center on English Learning & Achievement (CELA), which is studying excellence in the teaching and learning of the English language arts.

The four teachers described in this paper and the two schools in which they work were identified as "exemplary" by national education leaders, state education officials, and local district leaders. These schools and teachers are, in tangible ways, "beating the odds"; they are accomplishing things with students that most demographically comparable schools are not. Two of the teachers involved in this study teach in a highly innovative, "break the mold" inner city high school and two in a traditionally middle class but demographically fast-changing suburban middle school. The research task was, essentially, to find out on as many levels as possible what these English/language arts teachers, and their schools, were doing in order to help students beat the odds. Or, to put it in rather different terms, the task was to find out what "English" means to these four teachers, and how what happens in their classes is helping students to higher levels of achievement.

In following the working lives of these teachers, I regularly traveled to Dade County, Florida, where I attended the teachers' classes, audiotaping them and taking copious field notes. I sat in

on and audiotaped relevant portions of department meetings, team meetings, Critical Friends Group meetings, faculty meetings, and, beyond the school grounds, various professional organization meetings. I was the proverbial "fly on the wall," watching and recording the teachers as they interacted with students, colleagues, parents, administrators, and others involved in various ways in the education of the young people of Dade County. I also formally interviewed each of the teachers extensively several times, and spent many additional hours talking with them informally, sometimes in faculty rooms, sometimes in coffee shops, sometimes in their living rooms. When I was not physically in Dade County, I communicated with the teachers weekly via e-mail and occasionally via telephone, discussing what they had recently done, were currently doing, and were planning to do in their classrooms in the coming days and weeks, as well as in their professional lives beyond the classroom. In addition, I regularly interviewed their students face to face, singly and in groups, as well as occasionally via e-mail, gaining their perspectives not only on what they were experiencing in their English/language arts classes but on what they felt the larger value and meaning of their learning in English/language arts was and would be in the future. District personnel, administrators of these outstanding schools, and colleagues of the exemplary teachers were also interviewed. A great number and variety of educational, particularly English/language arts-related, artifacts, including student portfolios (which contained, for example, multiple drafts of essays, articles, research papers, poems, stories and other writings), quizzes and tests, projects, and reports were collected for analysis. I also collected teachers' curriculum guides, in-service materials, workshop and workbook materials, and other materials either generated or used in some way by the teachers and/or students.

In order to show what made these schools and teachers what and who they are, issues such as the following were explored: what the teachers' professional and personal networks were; where they got their ideas for lessons; whether and how they refined these ideas and adjusted them to the needs of their students; how they determined what the needs of their individual students were; what they thought was important for their students to learn in English class; how they taught literature; how they taught writing; how they prepared students for standardized tests such as the Florida Writes! Exam; how they assessed, formally and informally, student work; how they interacted with colleagues; how they were affected by being in schools affiliated with the Coalition of Essential Schools (both schools); how they changed as educators over time; and where they thought they were going as educators.

The fundamental purpose of this report, after brief general descriptions of the two outstanding schools and four exemplary teachers, is to answer in depth a few essential questions: What "counts" as English in these classrooms? How does English get taught and learned in them? What knowledge and skills are students gaining in them?[1]

THE SITES

Despite significant differences in their student populations and missions, both William H. Turner Technical Arts High School and Highland Oaks Middle School[2] deserve to be considered excellent, indeed exemplary, schools – schools that are making positive differences in the lives of the students who attend them. In both cases, for different reasons and in different ways, these schools are "beating the odds."

At the time of this study (the 1995-96 and 1996-97 school years), Turner was just four years old. Located in Miami's inner city, the school is surrounded by blight and economic and social depression, yet it is a multi award-winning technical arts high school. A visitor can immediately sense that Turner is an unusual environment, an inner city, educational oasis, a place of real learning and real excitement about learning, a place of true caring and of educational pride. A visitor's subsequent visits would only confirm these initial impressions. From the administrators to the teachers to the students to the security guards, there is a palpable sense at Turner that virtually *everybody* is invested in the educational enterprise, which in fact was deliberately emphasized by the founders of the school. That is, all staff are to be considered equally invested in the success of the school. As one teacher put it, "That's why the security guards here take their jobs as seriously as the principal." It is not only outcomes, in the form of rising test scores and numbers of graduates, that matter at Turner (although they matter a great deal), but the larger educational *context* as well, from the aggressively positive attitudes of those who work and study at Turner to the nearly-immaculate physical appearance of the school, inside and out. Finally, the entire, complex, multi-layered *process* of educating young minds, hearts, and souls matters to the staff at Turner. That process involves a great deal of meaningful interaction between administration and faculty, faculty and faculty, faculty and students, and students and students, within and beyond the classroom and even the school walls.

Highland Oaks, for many years among Miami's most prestigious middle schools, has long served a mostly white, middle, and upper middle class clientele. In recent years, however, Highland Oaks' demographic make-up has changed significantly. The school has become a good deal more ethnically and racially diverse, and includes many more students from less privileged socio-economic backgrounds than in previous times, including many recent immigrants to the United States. Despite these challenging demographic changes, Highland Oaks continues to be a place of high energy, of engagement and involvement at all levels. The administration, faculty, students, and staff care deeply that Highland Oaks remain an excellent school. In order to do so it has, in many ways, become a cutting-edge school.

For more information about each school, including a variety of factual and statistical data – including (where available) data comparing the schools to demographically similar ones as well as to, in some cases, the overall district of Dade County and the state of Florida at large – please refer to the Appendix.

THE TEACHERS

This study, and more generally the larger study of which it is a part, recognizes the importance of both macro and micro educational contexts for achieving excellence in English/ language arts instruction and learning. As was pointed out earlier, however, the primary focus of this report is upon the micro context: what happens in the English classrooms of exemplary teachers who teach in exemplary institutions.

By way of introduction to the four teachers and their classroom settings, the following are brief, impressionistic portraits of each of the teachers. The purpose of these portraits is to create for the reader a general sense of the individuals who have been identified as exemplary English teachers. In the section that follows, called "Excellence in English," each of the teachers is described in greater and more specific detail, particularly as she is seen "in action" with her students.

Chris Kirchner, 11th and 12th grade English/language arts teacher at Turner Tech

The first time I walked into Chris Kirchner's English classroom, she was wearing antlers. Her classroom was lit not from above by the fluorescent ceiling lights, but instead by an eclectic array of lamps that Kirchner had brought into the room to create a more homey, mellow atmosphere. On the walls and boards were notes, posters, and educational messages, including the basic tenets of the Coalition of Essential Schools. One poster read *Claim, Data, Warrant*, (three words that play a vital role in Kirchner's classroom, as will be shown later).

That first brief meeting took place on a mild South Florida December afternoon. Kirchner's twenty-eight students were seated around her in groups of three and four. The whole class was discussing – in an extremely lively manner, as if something both immensely important and rather fun were taking place – certain grammatical aspects of an anonymous student's essay that was projected onto a screen on a side wall. It was obvious that these students seemed genuinely to enjoy the exchanges that were taking place about grammar – about what was effective and what was not particularly effective with regard to the anonymous student author's use of language, syntax, and vocabulary. At one point Kirchner asked the students a question that she would ask many times during the course of my observations, a question that embodied one of her chief motivational strategies and which had to do with how the students would fare in the "real world": the question was whether or not a certain sentence construction used in the paper being examined would go over well with employers or college admissions officers. "No way," was the response of the chorus. "Okay," she said, "so give us a better way to do it." Numerous suggestions followed.

Leaving the room that day, I was already anxious to go back to find out if the few moments of the lesson I'd just observed were somehow a fluke or if this slightly wacky woman and her predominantly poor black and Hispanic students (who were juniors that year) could and would sustain this kind of energy for learning over the long haul. Two years later I could honestly report that Kirchner's classes not only are consistently engaging, but that the great majority of her students have continued to develop their skills as readers, writers, speakers, and thinkers. If, like many of their peers from the inner city, they entered high school with little sense of their own potential, they left it with a great deal more.

Kirchner herself is a force not only within her classroom but within her school and district, where she is a frequent contributor to the ongoing functioning of both. Also, because of her active involvement on the national level in the Coalition of Essential Schools movement (Sizer, 1984), she is a force for the educational future of the United States itself.

Janas Masztal, 10th and 11th grade English/language arts teacher at Turner Tech

In order to visit Janas Masztal's English class in the Agriscience Academy at Turner Tech, one has to walk out of the airy, pastel-colored main building, cross a well-maintained, palm-tree dotted parking lot, pass by several long rows of barns and stalls where animals and fowl are kept and cared for by agriscience students and faculty, cross a canal via a fenced pedestrian bridge, walk through a field of grass, and finally enter Masztal's portable classroom. The trip is not only pleasant (and quite unusual, given that this is an inner city setting), it is also well worth it from the standpoint of an observer's coming to understand what truly effective English teaching can look like.

Janas Masztal is casual, understated and ironic, and perhaps (befitting the academy she teaches in) a bit "earthy." Her rapport with her students, however, is as strong and intense in its own way as Kirchner's is with hers. There is a kind of big-sister feel to Masztal's relationship with her students. She knows their lives, their interests, their strengths and weaknesses as students of English and as young adults growing up in a troubled inner city. As her students silently read works of their choice, including newspapers and magazines, for the first fifteen minutes of the one hour and fifty minute block, Masztal "visits," kneeling beside individual students, asking how things are going in math, or how the sick cow did overnight, or what a student is reading and how he or she is enjoying it. Masztal is convinced that this curricular strategy known as Sustained Silent Reading has helped make readers out of many affirmed non-readers.

Like Kirchner, Masztal is an innovative, seemingly intrinsically motivat*ed* as well as motivat*ing*, and highly effective teacher. She particularly favors the idea of major projects as creators of curricular momentum for herself and her classes. One such project, which she ran in

conjunction with a history teacher in the Agriscience Academy, was based on the theme, "What is America?"(discussed further below as well as in greater detail elsewhere [Ostrowski, 1999]).

As many interviews with them over the course of two years revealed, Masztal's students, like Kirchner's, are convinced that the learning they do in her English class as well as the variety of ways in which that learning is accomplished, really matters to their lives; they know it matters in the present and that it will matter in the future. As one student explained, "She teaches us a lot about English, about books and writing, you know, and how to communicate with your boss . . . because you need English for everything. English is life!"

Rita Gold, 9th grade English/language arts teacher at Highland Oaks Middle School

One of the human dynamos that keeps Highland Oaks Middle School vibrant and ever on the educational cutting-edge, despite its continually changing demographic, is long-time though still youthful English teacher, Rita Gold. Gold teaches ninth graders at the attractive suburban middle school (Highland Oaks' grade structure is 7-9 as opposed to the more common 6-8; thus, her students are, in effect, high school students.) Essentially heterogeneously grouped, Gold's ninth graders vary widely in academic ability.

Gold's classes are places of innovative ideas in action. Students often work in small groups, for example in literature circles, where each member of the group has a specific role with specific responsibilities ("they like to be the 'expert' at something," Gold says); students also give presentations of various kinds; they "deconstruct" films; and of course they do a good deal of reading, conversing, and writing. Through all of this, Gold's persona is one of an older, wiser friend whom students know is doing everything she can to help them do well, but more than that, who is trying to bring them to truly come to love literary life as she does.

Along with her colleague and close friend Susan Gropper, Gold is a voracious idea-hunter. She is always on the look-out for new ways of teaching, new materials to use, new methods to try that make sense for her students. She takes ideas from the people at the Dade County District Office, from other teachers, from journals such as *English Journal*, and tailors them to the needs of her students. Her deeply grounded knowledge of and concern for her ninth-graders and their

potentialities and typical resistances, the depth and breadth of her own reading, and her active involvement in professional activities in her school and on the district level enable her to create a classroom environment that is consistently stimulating to students and that helps produce meaningful, tangible learning for the entire range of the learners in her charge.

Susan Gropper, 9th grade English/language arts teacher at Highland Oaks Middle School

Just a few years from retirement, Susan Gropper virtually embodies the definition of a "life-long learner." As a teacher, she brings to her ninth grade classes a great deal of energy, enthusiasm, freshness, and a genuine love of her subject that has apparently not diminished after three decades of teaching. Like the other teachers in this study, Gropper has the ability to speak with her students about a literary work in a way that simultaneously conveys to them that she knows the work deeply and yet retains an openness to new discovery, as if she, like they, were encountering the characters and setting of a particular work of literature for the first time. The effect is to draw students into the work with her.

Like Gold, Gropper is not to be mistaken for someone who will try any new English/language arts-related idea simply for the sake of being trendy or for the sake of mere variation; in fact, she is wary of many recent educational "innovations." When she adopts a new method, it is because she believes it has real merit. If she tries something and it doesn't work, she'll make adjustments. If after adjustments it still doesn't work, she'll drop it. On the other hand, if an idea – for example the idea of reciprocal teaching, which Gropper enthusiastically adopted several years ago – makes great sense to her and works well in her classes, she'll not only employ it in her own classes, she'll also spread the word, including giving workshops to teachers in her own school and other district schools at the request of school and district administrators.

Some Important Commonalities Among the Teachers

The four teachers in this study are very different people with quite distinct personalities and life experiences. However, they have certain important things in common, a few of which are

mentioned here in order to paint a picture of exemplary instruction that will not only be as complete as possible, but also as helpful as possible to other educators who might want to learn from these teachers and their various professional contexts. It is done, as well, in order to show how aspects of the larger contexts of their professional lives can directly influence what happens in their classrooms.

Influence of District Office

All four of the teachers in this study are highly influenced and aided by the Dade County District Language Arts Department (commonly referred to as "downtown") (Ostrowski, 1999), whose dedicated, innovative, and enthusiastic staff provide numerous workshops and teacher development programs, including an intensive, two-week summer writing institute which all Dade County English/language arts teachers have the opportunity to attend at least once in their careers. Many of the ideas and methodologies presented at district-sponsored professional development sessions as well as at the summer writing institute have been used to great effect by all four teachers in their classrooms. A few examples of ideas that originated from or were passed along in one form or another by the people "downtown" are the following: analysis of scoring rubrics in order to help students understand how best to write for the Florida Writes! Exam; graphic organizers; the modeling of poetry writing; literature circles; jigsawing; and reciprocal teaching. (More detailed examples of some of these concepts as they are actually used in the classroom are provided later in this report.)

According to district supervisors interviewed in the course of this study, not all teachers in Dade County take advantage of the numerous opportunities for professional development that the district offers; the teachers in this study usually do. Furthermore, the four teachers have all, at one time or another, been invited by the district to help write curriculum, provide workshops on various methodologies and innovations, and/or co-facilitate at the summer writing institute. The four received these invitations because of their reputations in the district as hard-working, intelligent, innovative, and successful teachers. District supervisors consider these teachers valuable resources not only for their individual schools and students, but for all of Dade County.

Involvement within Their Schools

Another commonality among the teachers is that they are all active within their schools. Several are or have been department heads, most have written and received grants for their schools, and most are on numerous school committees. The administrations of the two schools rely heavily upon the talents of all four of these teachers. Furthermore, in recognition of the important roles they play in their classes and schools, all have received either local or national education awards.

All of the teachers in this study have, within the walls of their schools, other faculty with whom to share and test ideas, plan lessons, and commiserate when necessary. At Highland Oaks, in order to create a Coalition of Essential Schools tenet of "schools-within-a-school," each of the teachers belong to a team of faculty who meet regularly to discuss students and curriculum. Both Gold and Gropper told me they have at times benefitted from being part of their respective teams; however, they consider each other their greatest resource within the school. Because they both teach ninth grade, the two women frequently plan units, projects, and lessons together. They brainstorm, do the necessary fieldwork (including reading works that they can potentially use in class), compare notes, and write plans together. Each woman, in separate interviews, cited the other as her greatest ally in professional life.

This strong working relationship between Gold and Gropper manifests itself in the classroom, to the benefit of all the students, because students in each class are, in effect, privy to the talents and resourcefulness of both teachers. For example, when Gropper finds an article on the difference between "love" and being "in love" to use with her students as part of a provocative introductory lesson to the study of *Romeo and Juliet*, that article is available to Gold and her students as well. Virtually every afternoon after the final bell, the two women meet to informally discuss that day's lessons. Thus, they give themselves a chance to debrief, troubleshoot, assess, and, when necessary, adjust.

Teachers at Turner Tech High School also work together professionally in academy teams, and/or in Critical Friends Groups (CFGs). CFGs are groups of teachers, in Kirchner's case from the same academy and in Masztal's from several academies, who meet a few times a month (as part of teacher planning days, or during the regular school day, with substitutes provided by the

administration) to talk, plan, and help each other with a wide array of educational issues. A variety of activities take place at these meetings. Teachers make presentations to their CFGs (for example an excellent multi-media presentation about ways of implementing alternative assessments was observed at one CFG meeting); they read and discuss relevant articles (for example, members of Masztal's CFG read an article from *Educational Leadership* called "Good Seeds Grow in Strong Cultures" and then discussed how the "culture" of Turner affected things like student learning and school morale); they attend professional development programs (for example they might learn how to use new computer software); and they sometimes break into small groups for feedback sessions on various plans or project proposals that members are working on. At one of Masztal's meetings, for example, within small groups teachers discussed issues around projects or units they were doing in their classes, with members of the group offering feedback. Masztal presented one component of her "What is America?" project, a speech that the students were to write and present with the aim of trying to answer the question, "What is America?" The speech was to be based on the evidence they had gathered from a number of sources including, of course, the literature they had read and discussed up to that point in the semester. This written as well as oral presentation would count as their mid-term exam. The issue at hand for Masztal was whether the evidence should in essence back up a general, intuitive claim about America, or whether the evidence should lead to a claim. As one member of the group pointed out immediately, the problem was at least partly semantic, and the lively discussion that the group engaged in around what differences there might be between making a claim and then finding evidence versus gathering evidence and then making a claim, helped Masztal clarify for herself exactly what she was asking of her students. At that same meeting, Masztal was of enormous help to a math teacher who was mandated by the administration to do more writing problems in math with her students. Masztal offered suggestions about framing questions as well as fashioning answers, and she also promised to provide the grateful teacher with materials she had in her classroom about the writing process.

Exemplary Teachers' Influences on One Another

Whenever I observed these teachers together (for example at Dade County Council of Teachers of English meetings or at district-sponsored events), they gravitated to one another and invariably began to exchange ideas about pedagogy or specific methodologies they were using and finding effective. That is, these four women are regularly put in a position to gain new knowledge – often by district supervisors – precisely because they are the kinds of people who are hungry for new knowledge in the first place and who are willing to "go the extra mile" to make themselves the best possible educators they can be.

Classroom Dynamics and Intimacy

Finally, one of the most important things the four teachers in this study have in common is that they all have a "quality" relationship with the majority of their students. Interviews with the students of the four teachers are full of comments about how Ms. Masztal (or Gold or Kirchner or Gropper) is "the best teacher in the school," or "the first English teacher I ever really liked," or "My role model." When asked to explain why, the students replied, "Well, she makes us think about things we never thought about." "You always have to go deeper with her." "It never gets boring in her class." "She chooses cool books and we have good conversations about them." "She lets you say what you feel." "She makes you work hard, but she's fair." "You really know you're learning stuff you're going to use." "She's preparing us for college." "She's preparing us for the real world." Long-term observations of the teachers with their students bears out that the four teachers are liked, respected, and admired by their students.

A basic fact about this group of teachers that contributes to classroom intimacy is that all four of them love literature and love to talk about literature; they enjoy it probably more than any other component of the subject of English. It is a principal reason for their becoming English teachers in the first place. Simply put, they love "book talk" (and book talk, incidentally, plays a major role in their personal lives as well in their professional ones [Ostrowski, 1999]). In the classroom, true literary conversations help establish a strong classroom dynamic. For fairly

significant portions of their class time, all four teachers and their students are involved in conversations about literature, especially about literary characters, their actions, and the motivations for those actions. These literary conversations create a classroom dynamic that in turn creates, or at the very least verges on, intimacy.

One tangible explanation for why this intimate classroom dynamic comes about, over time, is that each of these teachers frequently uses some form of reader-response technique to structure conversations around literary works (more on the specifics of this in a later section). Thus, their students are not merely reading to extract information and then check with the teacher that they are "correct," but rather are involved in considering motives for and meanings behind characters' actions and the consequences of those actions (Rosenblatt, 1978). The primary basis for their considerations, which are encouraged and mediated by teachers and which are often expressed in heartfelt ways by students, are their own lived experiences, as well as those experiences they have vicariously lived through other texts, including films and other media, with which they are familiar. The four teachers listen, sometimes affirm, sometimes ask for more information, often share their own personal experiences and reactions, and sometimes simply nod and call upon another student for further comment. Although it can not be said to happen in every class, it often happens that these teachers create environments that allow real conversations to take place, not mere clipped exchanges between teacher and an individual student (see Nystrand, 1997). And real, heartfelt conversations are by their very nature intimate.

This sense of intimacy between teacher and class also arises out of the fact that none of the four teachers "merely" teaches English. Gropper and Gold, at Highland Oaks Middle School, usually work together on lessons and units. Because they each choose to teach an extra class, the prep time in their school day is insufficient for the kinds of things they both love to do with their classes. Thus, they are frequent evening and weekend visitors to the school or to one another's homes, to plan, brainstorm, create. Similarly, more often than not both Kirchner and Masztal of Turner Tech can be found hours before and hours after the regular school day gathering materials, meeting with students to provide extra help on a project, or meeting with colleagues to plan collaborations. In the class, the fruits of this preparation, this dedication, becomes tangible. The students virtually feel it. It is contagious. This is, of course, not to say that these teachers are superhuman women who never have bad days, who never come to work less than fully prepared

for every possible contingency. It is to say, however, that they are people for whom most classes are important events, forums, if you will, where teachers' and students' minds and hearts meet for meaningful exchanges. The hour or two of class, from the start to the finish, matters. There is little wasted time. The reality of how much it matters to the teacher is readily apparent to the students, and this helps foster a classroom intimacy.

But even given that the relationships that these teachers have forged with their students are, in a particular sense, intimate, what of that? How does that affect students' learning of English? I believe it does so in several ways, including that it gives students a sense of inclusion in intellectual life, which they seem to enjoy naturally once they feel they belong. The intimate bond also fosters in students a sense of trust in their teachers, so that when teachers say, for example, that it is important to use proper subject and verb agreement in writing in order for readers to want to continue to read what a writer has to say, students readily accept that. When students receive honest C+'s on their essays they are, quite naturally, disappointed, but they trust that the teacher does not want to falsely inflate their grades, which would only lead to greater disappointment should their first college essays, say, come back with D's or F's. Classroom intimacy of this kind may not be absolutely necessary for learning to take place, but I believe it enhances learning in each of the four outstanding teachers' classrooms.

What Counts as English in the Classrooms of Four Exemplary Teachers

What does it mean, in the beginning of the 21st century, to be a teacher or student of English? In these four classrooms English, as one might expect, includes the teaching and learning of certain sets of skills necessary for reading and writing (for example, the learning and expanding of one's vocabulary, the mastering of subject-verb agreement, or the proper use of quotation marks), as well as the deepening of one's knowledge, appreciation, and understanding of literature (for example, coming to appreciate how Siddhartha's decisions can inform one's own decisions, or developing an understanding of the relationship between historical events and the literature of a period). It includes learning to articulate one's thoughts and ideas, orally as well as in writing. But the fact is that what counts as English in the four classrooms cannot be reduced to a few familiar terms, even important ones like "learning to write" or "learning about literature" or

"understanding inter-disciplinearity" or even "achieving high literacy." English in these classrooms involves writing, it involves reading and talking articulately about literature and its connections to history and other disciplines; but ultimately the subject of English seems to be about possible ways of living in the world. It is about speaking with other human beings and listening to them; about trying to persuade them or understand their points of view; about collaborating with them; about communicating with them through a variety of media on a variety of topics. It is about exploring options and thinking clearly and generatively; about broadening and reflecting upon one's own perspectives; about understanding the way language works; about appreciating beauty, especially the beauty that language can create; about accomplishing meaningful tasks; about nurturing creativity. Finally, in ways deeply personal and deeply public, English in these classes is about changing the world for the better.

Although ultimately the subject of English is greater than the sum of its parts, it is instructive to look at some of the components of the subject in order to see how each of the four teachers goes about presenting and teaching them to students. In the following sections, the large topics of writing, literature, mechanics and vocabulary, and oral language are explored. Woven into these explorations are other components of English, such as test-taking skills, development of generative comprehension abilities, and strategies for learning. Where appropriate these components are highlighted and discussed.

Teaching and Learning Writing

All four of the teachers in this study believe that helping their students learn to write well is important. Indeed they see writing instruction as a major part of their mission as English teachers. But for them, the topic of writing and the teaching of writing is huge and can be approached in a variety of ways. The teachers in this study see writing as directly and indirectly relating to reading and the study of literature, thinking and problem solving (Langer & Applebee, 1987), oral language/conversation, presenting/publishing, and creative expression. They make explicit the connections that exist between these various components. Furthermore, all of the teachers recognize and emphasize to their students that the ability to write well can empower

them on several levels. It can do so on the immediate level of achieving well on large scale tests such as the Florida Writes! Exam as well as on important writing exercises such as college essays. Writing can empower students on the level of personal expression, through the discovery-producing writing of personal essays, poems, and stories. The teachers are aware that the discoveries these types of writing produce are not only of the personal epiphany variety, but also are discoveries of how writers create essays, poems, and stories. And finally, writing empowers students on the level of practical communication, which takes forms such as the memo, the resume, and the business letter. These practical forms are germane to many of the students' career interests.

Because writing encompasses so much – indeed, Hillocks (1997) claims that writing is at the heart of all education – the teachers must familiarize their students with this formidable variety of kinds and ways of writing. This necessitates that teachers make choices and prioritize, since there is a finite amount of time to which they can dedicate any of the several components of English. The kind of writing being taught and studied in the four classes depended on the specific class and the writing competence of the individuals within it, the grade level of the students, the time of year, the academy the students were part of, the demands of the curriculum, the demands of the state, the kinds of literature they were studying, and the specific goals of a given project/unit/lesson. The examples resemble in important ways the everyday activities in each of the classes, in all of which, the amount and variety of writing done by students is enormous.

One major factor for Janas Masztal and her 10th grade class with regard to prioritizing writing was the fact that the students would be taking the Florida Writes! Exam, a statewide test that asks students to write either persuasive or expository essays. Masztal therefore spent a significant amount of time – portions of her block-schedule classes for a number of months prior to the test – teaching and integrating strategies for taking this particular test. Masztal was greatly aided in her efforts by workshops that had been provided by the district office in which the official Florida Writing Assessment Test Scoring Rubric was broken down and analyzed so that teachers could convey to their students exactly what raters would be looking for, and what kinds of qualities in the writing would rate the highest scores. Because the Florida Writes! Exam has become an important measure of school success in the teaching of writing in Florida, the

administration of Turner Tech set aside parts of days so that all 10th grade students in all classes practiced for the test.

There were several classes in which Masztal patiently went through the criteria for a high score on the Florida Writes! Exam, which essentially meant carefully reading the question and answering the question, using a given number of specific examples to back up a general thesis. The entire class also "wrote" (via out-loud brainstorming while Masztal wrote notes, sentences, and the introductory paragraph on the blackboard) the skeleton of an essay based on a question like those asked on the Florida Writes! Exam. Throughout the lesson Masztal reminded students to highlight right on the page exactly what the question was asking, including whether they were to compare or contrast elements and how many examples they were to provide. Students then wrote several mock essays on their own, which Masztal collected and commented upon (orally and/or in writing). Her comments focused mainly on issues of supporting their claims with evidence, following a basic five paragraph format, and on depth and quality of ideas.

Although writing for the Florida Writes! Exam was an important part of the curriculum for Masztal's students in the 10th grade, it was only one of many kinds of writing her students did over the course of the span of this study. They also wrote stories and poems. They did technical writing in the form of research reports about agriscience-related issues. Students wrote essays based on the literature they read, which often had, in some way, a relationship to agriculture.

As part of the year-long "What is America?" project, which Masztal and the Agriscience Academy's history teacher co-organized and implemented for their common agriscience students, small groups of students put together newspapers that dealt with historical events that were written in the present tense, as if the students were reporting an unfolding, topical event (see Ostrowski, 1999). Students also wrote book reports and literary essays on the works they read. Students told me that they liked the project a great deal for many reasons, including the following: they were learning history and English together and knowing something about one subject helped them to better understand the other; they felt they did better on assessments in *both* subjects; and they felt they were coming to new understandings about American issues that they had never thought about or considered deeply before, such as institutionalized racism and the concept of freedom. As for Masztal herself, she particularly liked the fact that a year-long, overarching themed project helped her organize and keep coherent her personal curriculum of

having students maintain literary journals; form small groups for various discussion, research, and writing purposes; read literary and historical works; write essays, book reports, and articles; and write and give speeches.

Masztal's students kept folders of their written work, and near the end of the year they compiled portfolios. The portfolios consisted of a variety of kinds of writing they had done over the course of that year (writings which were in every case written through several drafts), as well as paragraph-long rationales for their choices and a letter to the teacher about what "literacy" means to the student writer. Each piece in the portfolio was given a grade, and the sum of the pieces equaled the final portfolio grade. This portfolio grade was, in turn, factored into each student's overall final grade.

Because Chris Kirchner's students prepare for careers in business, they must be able to write, among other things, clear, cogent memos. "It's really important that they write memos well," Kirchner said. Early on in her teaching of the form, using her ever-present overhead projector, Kirchner demonstrated to her students the qualities of good memo-writing. Before long she had students engaged in a good deal of memo-writing themselves. Kirchner then projected student memos onto the side wall screen and conducted discussions with the class about the various strengths and weaknesses in their own memo writing. "Is this the absolute best way to communicate these ideas?" she would ask. "Can anyone see a way to make it even clearer?" "Is it too wordy? Can we make it more concise? Remember, it has to get the point across plainly and in as few words as possible." On most occasions there were ample hands raised; Kirchner's students were almost always willing to venture their ideas. It is important to point out the process Kirchner used here of introducing the form, practicing it, discussing it, and practicing it some more. Like the other three teachers in this study, for Kirchner and her students, learning to write is a recursive activity. Learning to write involves not only writing, but listening and conversing as well.

Kirchner did not let writing end with what was merely and overtly practical for her students. They also wrote a number of major essays on subjects related to the literature they were studying. One essay, on aspects of the novel *Siddhartha*, dealt with themes that Kirchner told the students would be "anchor" themes for their entire senior year and that she indeed alluded to throughout

the year during their study of other literary works. These themes had essentially to do with ways of, and important decisions about, living in the world. In teams of two, the students also wrote research papers related to making civic changes in their communities. These major research papers were written over the course of several terms and included the writing and revising of proposals, as well as several drafts of the paper itself. A few of these research papers resulted in actual changes being made in the community. For example, the work of two young women led to the installation of a traffic light in front of Turner Tech, where early morning fender-benders had been a daily occasion. Students also wrote poems, which they worked on separately and as a whole group for several classes; this writing had to do with students creating poems based on unusual metaphors such as "Violence Is a New Car," and then sustaining the metaphor for a minimum of 12 lines. Kirchner spent a good deal of class time with the whole class fine-tuning these poems, from the broadest overall effects to the choices of individual words students used. "Is that the best word here, or is it too ordinary? I'm not sure. You tell me." Many of the poems were eventually entered in a student poetry contest. In addition to these kinds of writings, students kept stock market journals while they participated in the national "Stock Market Game," rewrote prewritten paragraphs for the purposes of recognizing and correcting typical mechanical and other stylistic errors, and wrote sentences and paragraphs for various homework assignments, often in answer to questions related to the literature they were reading.

Probably the most important tool in Kirchner's repertoire of methodologies for teaching her students to write formal essays comes from Toulmin (1958), who instructs that well-argued essays follow a pattern of *claim*, *data*, and *warrant*. Kirchner knows that students find Toulmin's method difficult, but she believes that when they do come to understand it, over time, it helps them organize their thinking and writing effectively. In preparing her students to write essays, Kirchner constantly reminded them that not only were they making a claim, but that they must warrant their data if their essay was to be fully convincing. "If it's from the text, it's data," she told them. She provided them with strategies: "If you have trouble warranting, write a sentence that begins with 'if.'" She made explicit certain kinds of learning they would achieve: "Focus on warranting will lead you to the analytical thinking that so many people are claiming students in the 21st century will need." After assessing papers (with comments like "This must be explained, step by step. That explained thinking is what's called a warrant."), Kirchner reviewed the essays

with the students on the overhead projector and pointed out, among other things, the strengths and weaknesses of the papers based on their claims, data, and warrants. She showed the students a paper that was at the rough draft stage and then another that was much better developed, and compared the two. "You see how much more developed this writer's warrant is?" All the while the students had their own papers in front of them so that they could compare what they had done with the two works projected on the wall.

Like Masztal, Kirchner's students selected and edited pieces of writing they had done over the course of each year for their portfolios. Portfolios were assessed holistically and factored into students' overall grades.

In addition to all the other kinds of writing they did, both Masztal's and Kirchner's students (in fact, all students at Turner) produced and revised resumes, the writing and shaping of which took place mainly in English classes, where the teachers used professional resumes as models appropriate to the students' own vocations. In producing resumes, students were trained to recall all relevant experiences and were taught how best to represent those experiences in order to attract the attention of potential employers and/or educators.

Like students in the classes of Masztal and Kirchner, Rita Gold's and Susan Gropper's students were constantly writing *something*. One of the writing tasks Gold's students worked very hard on, which required and developed critical thinking skills, was an essay comparing and contrasting the written and film versions of the short story "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty." Before viewing the film, the students of course had already read the story and spent several classes discussing it, both in whole group conversations with the teacher and, at times, in their literature circles (literature circles are discussed in more detail in the teaching of literature section below). After viewing the film, Gold and the students engaged in an in-class, whole group discussion in which students read separate short essays about the comedic styles of Woody Allen and Mel Brooks. Using a series of Venn diagrams on the board, Gold had students come to the board to fill in either the separate or overlapping Venn diagrams depending upon whether the point they were making was one the two comedians had in common or not. Thus, only after reading, discussing, viewing, and brainstorming together did the students actually write individual essays comparing and contrasting the story and the film versions of "The Secret Life

of Walter Mitty." By the time they actually wrote the essays, they had not only become well-prepared to write a comparison-contrast essay, but they'd also become much more media-savvy than they were before, as a result of knowing the written story well and then seeing and talking about the liberties the film makers took with it either by necessity or for their own purposes. They also had gained strategies they could apply to future writing. Thus, on the way to further developing their literacy skills as writers, they also grew as thinkers and oral language users, and, particularly important in the 21st century, they became more media-literate as well.

In addition to their writing a number of formal essays like the one described above, Gold's students also engaged in less formal writings. For example, in conjunction with the literature they read, especially with longer works like Zindel's *The Pigman*, they kept response logs. In these logs, students sometimes were asked to write reflections on specific questions related to the work. For example, Gold asked the students to choose a sentence from a particular chapter of the novel and explain in a paragraph or two why they liked that sentence. At another time, she asked them to choose a sentence from a particular chapter that they did not like. At still other times students were free to respond to the work, or parts of it, in any way they pleased. These response logs connected the activities of reading and writing. Students saw and discovered what they thought in the process of reflecting for the purpose of writing. The activity of isolating and commenting about individual sentences, for example, helped students see the relationship between a part and the whole. When a student chose a sentence that could be said to contain the germ of the meaning of the entire work, Gold was ready to make that knowledge overt for the whole class. "The sentence Jermel chose is very important, because, as he says. . . ." This kind of writing exercise also helped students to better understand the craft that goes into writing good sentences, especially when elements of the sentence are pointed out and made explicit. Finally, response logs reinforced – as did so many of the writing assignments in the class – the *habit* of writing, which for these students and their teacher was a natural and important part of what "English" is.

One of the interesting formal writing projects Susan Gropper's students did also involved writing about *The Pigman*. After reading the book (at times together in class and at times individually, either in class or at home), and discussing it (at times as a whole group and at other times in literature circles), the students wrote essays in which they selected one of the two central

teenage protagonists, John or Lorraine, and explained why they would like that character for a friend. Of course, like most writing assignments given by the four teachers in this study, the writing of this paper developed over time and provided strategies that could be used for other writing. First, with the aid of graphic organizers, which give students visual and verbal clues about organizing their materials into related sections (sometimes rough clusters, sometimes paragraphs), the students got their basic ideas down on paper so that they could examine them, alter them, and/or develop them. Secondly, they wrote a first draft, or "sloppy copy." They then met in small groups to give one another feedback on these drafts. Lastly – almost lastly – they wrote final, edited drafts that they were permitted to show to another classmate for final inspection before handing the paper in.

Near the end of the year, the students in both Gold's and Gropper's classes selected several pieces from the many writings they had done over the course of that year to add to their portfolios. They were given time to rewrite one final time before adding materials to the portfolio, which followed them to their next grade level. In the case of Gold's and Gropper's students, that meant that their portfolios would go to the appropriate teachers at the high school they would be attending in the fall.

Clearly, the students of the four exemplary teachers have been shown the importance of writing in their current lives as well as in their future lives. They have been involved in many kinds of writing experiences. They have written with different audiences in mind and for different purposes. They write so regularly that writing is a habit. They also know that writing is an act of discovery, and that the aims of most kinds of writing are rarely accomplished in a single draft. They have been made conscious of the connections that exist between writing and reading, writing and talking, and writing and other media. It is completely natural for these student writers to think of writing as a process that involves some solo work but also a good deal of collaboration.

In interviews, some of the students expressed that they had come to enjoy writing. The enjoyment has come as a result of their writing experiences in the classes of one of these four teachers. A number of these students expressed a sense of confidence in themselves as writers which they claimed they did not have before. One young woman, for example, in reflecting upon

the experience of writing a long-term research paper in Masztal's class, wrote, "I know I can write a good research paper now."

There are several discernable reasons for these students' growing confidence as writers. For one thing, writing was clearly conveyed to them as an important part of life itself, and not just one of the things done in English class. In one way or another, all of the teachers made it clear to their students that their ability to write would have profound and practical effects on the quality of their lives, whether it be in affecting their ability to go to the college of their choice, or to express themselves in ways necessary to get and hold jobs. Teachers referred to their own experiences as student writers a number of times. Teachers often brought up these things by way of explaining to the students why they were doing whatever given kind of writing activities they were doing at the time. They were mentioned also when teachers explained the importance of getting feedback and of writing multiple drafts. Even students who simply did not like to write (several were interviewed) understood that they needed to write at least competently or they wouldn't reach their goals in life.

Teachers made it clear to their students that writing well meant writing often – and all of the students in these four classes wrote often, virtually every day, for example, in journals or to answer discussion questions or in drafting "major" essays. Writing well also meant soliciting as much useful feedback from others as possible, which the teachers made possible by forming small "writing groups" (Elbow, 1972). Writing well meant that a good deal of revising would be involved in most kinds of writing. As students internalized the elements that went into good writing, it became more and more natural for them to think of writing as a process and an act of discovery. They were less resistant to the recursive and looping process of brainstorming, drafting, discussing, revising, and editing that was usually involved in writing well. Students not only did a lot of writing in these classes but they understood why they were doing it. And the more writing they did, the more comfortable and confident they felt doing it.

Teaching and Learning Mechanics and Vocabulary

For the four teachers in this study, teaching writing and teaching mechanics, if not vocabulary, are virtually inseparable parts of the same whole. Nevertheless, all of the teachers apportion some class time to the specific teaching of mechanics and vocabulary. One of the teachers, Chris Kirchner, dedicated significantly more time to these things than the three others. In fact, Kirchner, of Turner Tech's Business Academy, calls herself the "grammar queen." She believes that if her traditionally disadvantaged students are to succeed in the world of business, they will need well-developed writing and speaking skills, and so she dedicates a fair portion of class time to the teaching of mechanics. Though Kirchner can talk "street" as well as any teacher, and sometimes does so with her students, she believes, and tells her students quite often – and based on interviews, the students have come to agree – that street language, either spoken or written, will not enable them to succeed either in college or in the business world. Kirchner has said more than once, "If you write something like that in college, they'll laugh at you." Because the students are motivated to get into college and/or have successful careers (and at least part of that general motivation can be attributed to the academy structure at Turner – see Ostrowski, 1999), when Kirchner teaches grammar the students tend to pay attention. She has convinced them that it matters. As one of Kirchner's students put it, "If you hand in a paper in college and it's all misspelled and the grammar's all messed up, they won't take you seriously. They might not even read what you wrote."

So how does Kirchner teach grammar? She does it both within the context of the students' own writing as well as through overt, non-contextual grammar lessons. During one class, Kirchner spent an hour or so of her two-hour block teaching students about compound sentences, complex sentences, and compound-complex sentences. The fact is, the students were not only engaged, they appeared to have a great time. Rather than lecturing about these kinds of sentences and the differences between them, Kirchner had student volunteers come to the front of the classroom and actually become grammatical parts of sentences. She did this by taping large plastic signs onto their chests that read "coordinating conjunction" and "dependent clause." "Oooo, Ms. Kirchner, Ms. Kirchner, " one enthusiastic young man called out, straining his arm toward her from his desk. "I want to be an independent clause. Pleeeeeeeease." And an

independent clause he became. When all the necessary sentence "parts" were gathered in front of the room, Kirchner began to ask the class where, for example, Keisha, who was a prepositional phrase, belonged in a complex sentence. "Put her right up there at the front, Ms. Kirchner," a young man said. "Then you need Bertrand next to her." "Is he right about that?" Ms. Kirchner asked the class. "Yep," they responded.

When asked about the always thorny issue of whether this kind of exercise actually carries over into their writing, Kirchner asserted that the exercise was not done merely for the fun of it, nor even merely for the purpose of engaging the students. Rather, she believed that because she constantly stresses the importance of the relationship between the mechanics of writing and actual good writing, in combination with her using enjoyable and unusual methods, that students do learn the grammar, and that that learning does contribute to improvement in their overall writing skills. "They do become better writers," says Kirchner.

Kirchner constantly reinforced the mechanics she had already taught in isolation when, for example, she went over student papers on the overhead projector. So that if, in going over a student paper with the class, she saw a place where two or three simple sentences could have been combined, she would ask the class if there was any other way the writer could have presented the same information in order to create more sentence variety. "She could put those two sentences into one," a student might suggest. "Good, and what do we call that?" "Complex? No. Compound? Yeah, compound." "You got it!"

Thus, teaching grammar is part of the conversation that is English in Kirchner's class. Even the learning of certain rules of grammar is an active endeavor in this class. Furthermore, Kirchner makes sure the reasons for their knowing and using what they know is overt.

While none of the other three teachers in this study seem to enjoy the teaching of grammar to the extent that Kirchner does, they all recognize that for most of their students, writing well necessitates both some isolated learning of skills as well as a lot of practice using skills in the context of whatever writing they are doing at the time. For example, for a time, Masztal dedicated a part of every Friday's class to topics such as subject-verb agreement and the uses of subordinate clauses. She would lecture a bit about the properties of the given item of study, including giving examples on the board, and then have students practice the skill, sometimes using pre-made worksheets. She would emphasize that in the next piece of graded essay writing

they did, she would be grading for content as well as for the particular skill or skills being studied. In this way Masztal connected the isolated study of a particular skill with the contextualized larger and generally more meaningful writing the students were doing.

Rather than dedicating long parts of a class to mechanics, Gropper preferred to teach grammar in five- to ten-minute mini lessons near the beginning of some classes. For example, upon entering the class, students were directed to look at the side board, which asked them, in one case, to copy and put the necessary quotation marks in the proper places on the five sentences written on the board. Gropper then invited five volunteers to come to the board, add the quotation marks, and explain why they put them where they put them as well as what purpose they serve in the sentence. Later, as the class read and discussed a part of a short story, Gropper interrupted a literary thought to say, "Notice the quotation marks around the character's actual words." Gropper, like all of the exemplary teachers in this study, was conscious of reinforcing and integrating what students learned in one domain or context in other domains or contexts when the opportunity presented itself. These four teachers are all natural "connectors," because they recognize that ultimately the various elements of English form a whole, and because they know that for learning to take place they must model these connections for students, and reinforce them as often as they can.

All four teachers interwove vocabulary with the study of literature and the act of writing. If a new word pertained to the study of mechanics, or technology, or was specifically academy-related (e.g. "divest" in the business academy) the teacher would define and explain it, as necessary. In all four cases, most vocabulary words came directly from the stories, poems, plays, novels, articles, and essays the students were reading. Sometimes in going through a piece, important new words were pointed out by the teacher and the class highlighted them before the piece was read. Then, during the reading of the piece, the class would discuss its meaning based on context clues and structural analysis. Sometimes certain words were selected by the teacher before the reading of a piece and discussed ahead of time, so that when students encountered the words, they would have had some initial familiarity with them and could see them used in the specific context of that work. Gropper sometimes assigned homework in which students were to draw pictures or illustrations that depicted the meanings of the vocabulary words they were studying – which, again, came from some context, usually literary, relevant to their other work in

English. Many of Gropper's students displayed a good deal of artistic talent in completing these assignments. As with most of the separate components, there were deliberate attempts on the teachers' part to contextualize vocabulary, connect it, and make it relevant to a larger vision of what English is.

For all four teachers, assessing mechanics occasionally was done via specific grammar quizzes and tests (Kirchner, for example, had students rewrite paragraphs that she had written with deliberate mechanical errors), but more commonly assessment was factored into their writing assignments. With formal essays, the teachers most often gave multiple grades for components like content, support (evidence; warrant), organization (form), style, and, of course, mechanics.

Teaching and Learning of Literature

Before describing some of the ways literature is taught in the four teachers' classrooms, I want to mention some of the works the teachers chose to use (in each case, the teachers did in fact choose the works; they were not mandated). These included many of those works found on lists of typical literary works dealt with in high school classes (Applebee, 1991), including the works of Shakespeare, Fitzgerald, Whitman, and Thurber. The four teachers also taught works that might be said to be achieving modern canonical status, works like *The Pigman, A Day No Pigs Would Die, Their Eyes Were Watching God, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, and *Bless Me Ultima*. Other works studied included contemporary novels like *The Color of Water* and *The Car*, as well as numerous short stories and poems.

It is rare that any of the four teachers speak for more than a few minutes in class before involving students in at least some discussion. Students' voices frequently dominated structured yet free-wheeling conversations around literary works, with very little input from the teacher for long stretches of time (this was most pronounced in Kirchner's class).

The following paragraphs describe one such occasion, or "event," – a Socratic Seminar on the topic of Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha*, held in Kirchner's senior class. It took place in the month of October during the second year of the study.

For Kirchner, the idea of the Socratic Seminar comes out of a "tool box" of ideas from the Coalition of Essential Schools, wherein *all* students, not just those deemed academically superior, are given a forum to demonstrate their knowledge and express their ideas. Kirchner has participated with other faculty in training sessions for conducting Socratic Seminars. Her comfort level with them, she says, increases each time she conducts one.

In the view of many educators, one of the hallmarks of a good teacher (and a good thinker in general) is her or his ability to tailor an idea to a specific situation so as to maximize the idea's relevance and effectiveness in that situation. Kirchner is nothing if not an expert educational "tailor." As she conducts them, Socratic Seminars are special events that involve a good deal of preparation and scaffolding on her part and on the parts of her students. For example, it is not the case that the students merely read the work and then came in on the designated day and sat facing each other and began talking about what they liked and didn't like about the book. Instead, by the time the Socratic Seminar on *Siddhartha* took place, students had all 1) read the book and had class discussions about some aspects of it (other aspects, by Kirchner's design, would come up for the first time during the seminar); 2) been given, in small groups of four or five students per group, a specific question that dealt with a particular and important aspect of the book, and which involved either some research or some in-depth analysis (for example, describing the basic tenets of Hinduism, or analyzing the symbolic meaning(s) of rivers in the novel); and 3) written, individually and independently, a major essay on some aspect of the small group's question, due on the morning of the seminar. For her part, Kirchner had created an "essential question" around the entire unit on *Siddhartha* ("What suggestions for living in the modern world are offered in *Siddhartha*?"). She also carefully prepared the 10 or so separate larger student questions, read and commented on early drafts of student papers, sat in on small groups as they worked out their responses to the questions, prepared the class for the procedure of a Socratic Seminar, and informed them about the criteria by which they would be evaluated. These criteria included: 1) students' demeanor and decorum during the seminar (both of which she had carefully explained); 2) their background knowledge of the author and the work; 3) the quality of their claims, data, and warrants; and 4) their ability to connect to others' points. Kirchner also created and printed out copies of a rubric that invited guests – generally other faculty and staff at Turner – filled out while or after observing the seminar. Finally, Kirchner invited students from the Broadcasting

Academy to film the seminar so that the students could view it later and analyze the conversation.

On the day of the *Siddhartha* seminar, Kirchner arranged the desks so that they were in two large sections that faced each other. After a discussion about the students' experiences writing the papers on *Siddhartha*, which they had handed in that morning, the seminar itself began. Kirchner asked one of the small groups to present its findings about Hinduism. Each member of the group reported on a different aspect of the religion. The reports were punctuated with personal comments such as, "This part really surprised me . . ." and "This is a lot like my own religion . . ." When the hands of students who were not in the reporting group were raised, either Kirchner or the student who was currently speaking called on other students, who either contributed further information, asked questions, or made personal comments. It went this way with all the groups, whose topics ranged from the just described factual to the much more analytical, involving for example, the way the author treats the question of sexuality. The following transcript excerpt is offered to suggest the flavor of the conversation that took place that day. Note how seamlessly the students relate aspects of the novel to their own lives and situations, and how they build conversation by commenting upon or alluding to one another's comments.

Joe: The concept that was brought out about Siddhartha and Bovinda was that Bovinda was a seeker, and that because of him seeking her, he wanted to obtain the highest position, he missed a lot of other things, and Siddhartha being not a seeker, saw and got to experience. So tie in with Jennifer and everyone else's comments, I just wanted to throw that in.

Kirchner: Gina.

Gina: This is our time, in our particular situation being in business. Siddhartha would be like the entrepreneur, the person that definitely goes out to be what they want; they wanted their own laws, they want to learn their own way, they want to be (inaudible). Bovinda would be the person that would be content, have somebody to tell you that yes, this is right, this is wrong, the person who would go to a major corporation and fill in a position there, and have the security of being in a major corporation.

. . .

Joe: I'm glad that Gina brought that point up about the analysis for today. Because I completely forgot that until she mentioned it. I find that to bring it down to our level, I know many of us are planning on going to school with our friends, you know, are going away to college to party with our friends, because we don't want to go alone on the road of life. So, many of us are going to give up the accomplishments that we might have been able to attain for that friendship. . . . I just . . . never really looked at that before. I know with me personally, I didn't want to go away to college, because I didn't want to be away from friends and family. And sometimes, in order to get what you need to get done, you need to go it alone.

The entire seminar was characterized by such talk: students spoke with knowledge of the novel and with a good deal of passion. They listened respectfully to one another, and even when they disagreed with one another, they did so in a manner that was careful to warrant their own claims, and they did so with the utmost respect for one another's opinions and beliefs.

Kirchner's students were able to enjoy such a "grand conversation" because in essence they had been learning to participate in such conversations for a long time, certainly since they'd entered her class. (Many occasions where such conversations around literature or related topics took place were observed.) In these conversations the students' ideas and opinions were not only "tolerated" or even respected by Kirchner but actively solicited; students' voices "counted" so long as what they said could be "backed up," or "warranted with data." When students related stories of personal experience, these stories were listened to respectfully and often commented upon by Kirchner and other students. Furthermore, Kirchner regularly shared her personal experiences with the class, often relating them to the works the class was studying or to topics they were discussing. Thus, she naturally modeled for her students forms that reader's responses and good literary conversations could take.

For all four of the teachers, the study of literature can be looked at as a kind of invitation to enter a literary world. One of the ways Susan Gropper invited her students into the study of literary works was through the use of prediction. This method exploits and makes conscious what already happens on a subconscious level in the minds of readers; that is, readers are always

making predictions about what will come next, based on a number of factors, including the title of the work or a chapter title, what has already happened in the work, what has happened in other works that might be relevant, and what has happened to readers in their real lives or in lives they know about. Pleasure and surprise in reading can be derived both from having expectations met (predictions confirmed) or from having them thwarted.

Gropper began the study and discussion of several works of literature, including "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty," by asking her students to write a brief prediction of what they thought the story would be about based solely on the title. After allowing them to think and write for a few minutes, Gropper asked for volunteers to read or tell what they'd written. Student responses revealed a fairly wide range of predictions, and in each case Gropper was careful to ask the student to articulate the relationship between the title and his or her prediction. In that way, even in this fairly informal context, students had to defend their responses with careful thinking and reasoning. The students then went on to read the first paragraph and make another prediction in writing about what the story was about, which was again discussed. Finally they read the entire first page, and then followed the same procedure of writing a prediction and then discussing it. By the time they were ready to discontinue making formal predictions about the story, the students appeared keen to discover whether or not their predictions would be accurate or not. That is, they were motivated to read. Thus, in the course of 20 or 25 minutes, Gropper had them reading, writing, and talking about "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty."

Another way of inviting students into the literature they are reading is the use of literature circles. Literature circles are small groups within the larger group brought together for various purposes relating to the study of a work of literature. The teachers in this study use small groups frequently, and they cited many reasons for this. For example, students who are reluctant speakers in large groups are often much more effusive in small groups, thus they are able to practice public speaking in a non-threatening environment. Also, small groups encourage turn-taking and collaborative and generative thinking. Ideas contributed by one member build upon or challenge the ideas of other members. Students are exposed to multiple perspectives on literary issues, including perspectives they may not have anticipated and which alter their thinking in profound ways. Finally, in small groups like literature circles, students play different roles and thus learn different ways in which one can function in a group.

Gold is a great believer in literature circles, for all of the above-mentioned reasons. In her literature circles, students are assigned roles of either "leader" (leads the discussion), "page" (the note taker, or minute-keeper), "reporter" (gives oral report of group's discussion to the larger group), and "task master" (makes sure the group stays on task). In one of Gold's classes, these groups met to discuss aspects of *The Pigman*. Students were asked to create a diagram of the novel's plot, to identify the central conflict in the novel, to identify a major theme of the novel, and to describe each of the central characters. Most of the groups were quite lively, and students seemed to take their roles seriously. (Roles changed often throughout the year so that each student in a group played each role at one time or another.) A few of the groups seemed quiet and hesitant to get underway, or perhaps uncertain of how to proceed. These were the groups where Gold spent the majority of her time, injecting a good deal of energy and guidance.

A related method that Gold (and Gropper, as well) occasionally employed was that of "jigsawing." There were times during the semester when Gold gave each literature circle a choice of seven or eight books to read. In one case, this was done in conjunction with a multicultural research report students were expected to write, with each of the seven or eight books on some cultural topic or written by a member of a given culture or ethnicity. After agreeing on a book within the circle, each member of the literature circle read the book, and as a group, discussed it and wrote about it. Jigsawing involved one member of each literature circle moving into a different literature circle and discussing with that group the book his or her group had read. In this way, all the groups got to hear what the books their group had not chosen were about. The member who described the book to the new group was referred to by Gold as the "expert" on that book, a label students took a great deal of pride in having. Gold reported that as a result of the jigsawing technique, many students asked if they could read the book an "expert" had described to them.

What about the study of poetry? Some teachers and students complain that the study of poetry is, for a variety of reasons, difficult. Even students who enjoy writing poetry can resist studying the poetry of others. One engaging poetry lesson took place at Turner Tech in Janas Masztal's class. The poem under consideration was Whitman's "I Hear America Singing," –an apt selection that year, given that it was the year of Masztal's "What is America?" project. The especially

interesting and fun part of this lesson involved Masztal's assigning each group of five or six students to give a choral reading of the poem to the rest of the class. After first reading a few paragraphs in a textbook that gave some necessary background information about Whitman, and then reading and discussing the poem as a whole group, Masztal sent the various small groups off to their own meeting places around the Agriscience Academy's mini-campus to prepare a choral reading, or performance, of the poem. The students were instructed to be as creative and as personally interpretive as they could. One group went out to the gazebo beside the canal, where they worked out a routine: a different student read each verse in the voice of a particular character while the others provided background sound appropriate to that character's livelihood (for example the sound of a saw for a carpenter and the sound of a wailing baby for a mother.) The preparation for the presentation unfolded just as Masztal would have liked, a blend of fun and seriousness that kept the students on-task but with frequent injections of humor and wit on their part. For the final 15 minutes of class, groups presented their choral readings, to the great enjoyment of all.

What did Masztal accomplish by "teaching" the poem this way and not in some much more traditional fashion? First of all, on the macro level, by teaching the poem in the context of the larger, year-long theme of "What is America?," she enabled the students to immediately anchor the individual work to that theme, a theme about which they had already been thinking, talking, and writing a great deal. Having this anchor gave them a chance to think critically about how the characters Whitman describes and the issues the poem implicitly raises related to their evolving sense of what America is.

On a more micro level, she enabled the students to take the poem off the page and put it into their own throats. In order to work out an effective choral reading that wouldn't embarrass them in front of their classmates, students had to talk about the poem with each other. They had to negotiate and voice opinions. "No, that's not the way he'd sound, I think he'd have a deeper voice. And maybe out of breath." It is fair to say that as a result of learning the poem this way, many of the students will remember "I Hear America Singing" for a long time.

Like all the teachers in this study, Masztal explored a variety of literary genres with her students. In addition to poetry, they read novels, short stories, and essays. During the year of the "What is America?" project, all the readings were somehow related to that overarching question.

Students discussed these literary, journalistic, and historical works in their small groups and as a whole group, and, like the students of the other teachers in this study, regularly wrote in conjunction with their reading and their conversations around that reading. Even after doing their daily sustained silent reading, students wrote for five minutes in their journals about whatever they'd been reading, including feelings and thoughts based on that reading. In all these ways, connections were being made between thinking, reading, and writing; and thinking, reading, and writing were more and more becoming habitual for the students.

The study of literature for the four teachers is, on the most fundamental plane, of course about "reading." And students must first and foremost do the reading, which is in itself a big problem for many English/language arts teachers. One comes away with a strong sense that the majority of the students in these classes are reading. Given that, the study of literature becomes an invitation to an in-depth conversation about what one has read, not only for the purpose of knowing what a given piece of literature is literally "about," but for the way a given piece of literature can reveal insights about life and about oneself. It is the kind of envisionment building Langer describes (Langer, 1994). It is about exchanging thoughts and contributing ideas and perspectives into a larger conversation where these ideas and perspectives mingle and mix and affect each other in unpredictable ways. The topics are varied, from issues of history and culture to the myriad personal motives that drive human actions. For many students, including those who may be silenced in various ways by school culture, the study of literature is about gaining confidence in one's own voice. It is about moving deeper into the knowledge of the ways language conveys meanings. These are valuable experiences and valuable tools for anyone who will ever be asked to think through a problem, interpret a situation, investigate a motive, or use language for any of a thousand purposes in any of a thousand situations.

It should be noted here again that the study of literature in these four classrooms is not isolated from other components of English but is instead intricately related to them. Much of the reading the students do is accompanied by or followed up with writing, just as it is accompanied by or followed up with conversation. Furthermore, teachers make these connections explicit, so that students form the general habit of looking for the relationships among things, and trust that the search will yield interesting results. Finally, in speaking of habits, it must be mentioned that

many of the students interviewed and observed for this study have become habitual readers as a result of their experiences in their English classes, in large part due to their coming to accept their teachers' invitations to explore literary works.

English and the Uses of Oral Language

In describing just a few of the many activities that comprise English in the classrooms of these four teachers, I have already touched upon the uses of oral language in those classrooms, because oral language is, quite obviously, essential to virtually every one of those activities. The purpose for this brief section is to isolate "oral language" from contexts and examples already given for the purpose of analyzing the role it plays and the contributions it makes to students' learning.

Whether in a career-oriented environment like that of Turner Tech or a more academically oriented one like Highland Oaks, one of the first benefits for students who are given many opportunities to present their thoughts and ideas orally is that it is excellent preparation for many careers in which it is necessary to be comfortable presenting information and ideas to other people. Literary conversations like the ones that take place regularly in the four teachers' classes, for example, helped students feel comfortable and confident expressing themselves in front of others. In many cases they were thinking "on their feet," articulating ideas that were only then, in the midst of the activity, forming and reforming as students interacted with texts, teachers, and one another.

The students were being trained, furthermore, to be able to defend their ideas not only in writing but in speaking, whether it be as a result of Kirchner's insistence of their always "warranting their data," or the presenting of solid, defendable "evidence," as Masztal had her students do for the "What is America?" midterm speech. Gold often asked multiple whys of her students when she felt their oral responses to her or other students' inquiries were inadequately developed or defended. Nor was Gropper one to allow a brief oral response to substitute for a more developed one. "Tell me more about that," was a frequent comment of hers. These teachers

were developing in their students an understanding of the need to articulate one's thoughts as fully and thoughtfully as possible.

All four of the teachers saw the study of English as a kind of grand conversation in which as many voices, as many perspectives as possible were invited in. The intimate atmosphere, the acceptance of many viewpoints so long as they were informed in some way, the literary works themselves which were so full of ideas ripe for conversation, and the teachers' passion for "book talk" – all these things contributed to environments in which oral language played a key role in learning.

Finally, all four teachers used small groups for the purpose of research, writing, and the study of literature. In these groups, even reluctant, shy students often felt comfortable enough to lend their voices to conversations. Students in small groups learned to listen to one another, to negotiate the best ways to make their voices heard in the group, and to be open to changing their perspectives based on the voiced perspectives of others.

Conclusion

The majority of students I observed for this study are doing better than many would have expected of them, given the history of inner city schooling in the case of Turner Tech and the rapidly changing demographics at Highland Oaks. How are these students able to "beat the odds?" The fact that they are in excellent schools is part of the answer; these are schools where the administrators, faculty, and staff care about them and about continuing to try to affect what education can be, rather than leave it at what it has always been. A second explanation for why these students are beating the odds is that they are fortunate enough to be assigned to teachers who are, in many ways, exemplary. All four of the teachers followed for this study are unusual in their dedication to their students, their involvement in education on many levels, their creativity as teachers, and their hunger as learners and innovators.

I think it a fair conclusion, even after a relatively brief examination of the classrooms of these four English teachers, to say that English in these classrooms encompasses a wide and varied, but interrelated, educational terrain. The four teachers see it as their mandate to provide a rich array

of literacy-related activities and experiences for their students – activities and experiences that revolve around wide reading, wide writing (and thus developing the *habit* of reading and writing), expansive and prolonged thinking and problem-solving, and ample opportunities for conversing about and presenting what they are learning to faculty as well as to one another – so that these students can make intelligent, informed decisions in personal and public matters throughout their lives. The teachers are preparing the students not only to be flexible in their abilities to find and use knowledge and information, and to make connections among many pockets of knowledge, but also to create new knowledge.

Furthermore, the students are learning to understand themselves and other human beings and the needs and desires and capabilities that make them human. While practical matters such as getting into college and getting good jobs are often emphasized as motivators in these classrooms, none of the teachers has lost sight of the important aesthetic value in activities such as studying and discussing literature and writing creatively. Students come away from these classrooms prepared for what comes next, be it another year of high school or college or a job, but they also come away more reflective of what's already come in their lives, and what all of it might mean.

Endnotes

1. Several other case studies more specifically examine the professional lives of many of the teachers in the larger study. For a complete list, see page 46.
2. Names of all teachers and schools are actual names, not pseudonyms.

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Appendix: Descriptions of Participating Schools

William H. Turner Technical Arts High School

William H. Turner Technical Arts High School was founded in 1993 with the vision of being "an inner city high school that would provide academic and technical skills to prepare youth for the 21st century." Leaders at Turner call the combined academic and technical curriculum "a two-for-one system."

A school of choice operated by the Dade County Public Schools, Turner draws students from the entire county and currently serves 2,073 students, mostly African American and Hispanic. Though a school of choice, the majority of students come from the lower socio-economic community surrounding the school site. Eighty-five per cent of these students qualify for free or reduced lunch.

Criteria for student membership at Turner include the requirement that students miss no more than 10 days per year, that grades in conduct be no lower than C, and that the student demonstrate a strong interest in a technical area. Turner holds strict academic standards. It has raised the minimum GPA to 2.0. Students who earn two or more D's on a report card are put on academic probation. The second time this happens, the student is "fired," which means they are returned to their neighborhood school. Since 1993, Turner has fired more than 300 students.

Turner incorporates an integrated curriculum and works on an academy system. Students and teachers are assigned to one of seven academies: Agriscience; Applied Business Technology; Health; Industrial Technology; NAF/Fannie Mae Foundation/Academy of Finance; Broadcasting; and Residential Construction. Within each academy, teachers and students work in teams. The academic curriculum is integrated into the career major the student has selected. Students select a career academy when they enter the school in the ninth grade. By successfully completing a sequence of core and technical courses, they gain certification in one or more related fields. All students compile an active career portfolio, included in which are examples of their individual work as well as a current resume. In all academies students participate in a variety of hands-on experiences both in actual work places as well as school-based enterprises. There are numerous opportunities for all Turner students to use computers and other technologies.

Standardized Test Scores

Although Turner is a relatively new school, each year standardized test scores on both the High School Competency Test and the Florida Writing Assessment have increased significantly.

High School Competency Test (HSCT). After only three full years of existence, 28% more of Turner's students passed the state's minimum competency test, the HSCT, than did students in other nearby high schools. In 1996, for example, Turner students' average score on the Communications section of the test was 73, as compared to 48 and 42 at two demographically similar schools. In fact, Turner is closing the gap between itself and Dade County's premier high schools; this, "despite the fact that many of the ninth-grade students started at a much lower achievement level" *(Profile Three: William H. Turner Technical Arts High School*, a report published by The American Federation of Teachers). On the Communications portion of the HSCT, Turner students score above the county average.

Florida Writing Assessment (Florida Writes! Exam). On Florida's writing assessment, the Florida Writes! Exam, which uses a 1-5 scale, Turner's combined scores increased from a 2.5 in 1993-94, to 3.3 in 1995-96, compared to a 2.8 to 3.3 increase county-wide over the same period. In 1997, both the county and Turner increased the combined score to 3.6. In 1997, on the "Writing to Explain" portion of the test, 87.6% of Turner students scored above a 3.0, as opposed to a state-wide average of 86.7%. In the same year, on the "Writing to Convince" portion of the test, 92.7% of Turner's students scored 3.0 or better, as compared to the state-wide average of 85.8%.

Special Awards

Turner Tech was recognized as one of America's top 10 New American High schools in an awards program sponsored by Business Week and McGraw-Hill Educational and Professional Publishing in cooperation with the National Center for Research in Vocational Education and the Office of Vocational and Adult Education, United States Department of Education.

The U. S. Department of Education together with the Big Picture Company, funded by the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994, identified Turner Tech as one of five urban high schools on the cutting edge of educational reform.

The American Federation of Teachers highlighted Turner as one of five national models of school restructuring that focus on helping students reach high academic standards and prepare for good jobs.

Special Programs

Summer School. Summer school is provided to entering ninth graders because they often start further behind academically than success in Turner will likely permit. Summer school classes include non-academic courses like fine arts and physical education; this allows students to concentrate on academics during the regular school year.

System for Applied Individual Learning (SAIL). Before, during, and after school, Turner students can go to the SAIL lab to get computer-aided remedial instruction in reading on one of the lab's 20 computers. The Turner faculty set a reading standard of 70 (scale 1-100), based upon the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) program. The DRP indicated that 70 was a sufficient level for college preparation. Turner students use SAIL to help them reach or exceed this level.

Attendance

Since its inaugural year, attendance at Turner has been consistently above that of demographically similar schools as well as above average for the entire county. For example, Turner attendance averages have gone up from 92.6% in 1993 (the county average that year was 84.6%) to 94% in 1997 (the county average was 92%).

Funding Sources

Turner receives the same amount of funding from the school district as all other Dade County public high schools. Over and above that amount, the school receives significant funding from Perkins vocational money, grants from the Dade County Public Education Fund, the Fannie Mae Foundation, and the National School-to-Work Office. Also, businesses and community organizations donate various products and services (see below).

Community and Business Partnerships

Turner enjoys significant partnerships with several area businesses and corporations. Partners include the Fannie Mae Foundation, the National Association of Home Builders, Lennar Corporation, North Shore Hospital, the Jewish Home for the Aged, Rinker Concrete, In Roads, and *The Miami Herald*.

Teacher Planning, Teacher Collaboration, and Professional Development Time

Teachers receive one preparation period and one lunch period per day. Faculty meet as entire faculty relatively infrequently. The same is true for disciplinary departments, which meet on average about once a month. Because of its academy structure, meeting times for the faculty members of a given academy – variously called "teams" or "CFGs" (Critical Friends Groups) meet on average about 12-15 hours a semester.

Highland Oaks Middle School

Because it maintains high academic standards while remaining on the cutting edge of educational reform, Highland Oaks is recognized by Dade County as a model middle school program. The school, which utilizes the middle school philosophy, is frequently asked to receive visitors to assist with their middle school development. Highland Oaks has under way a variety of academic programs and initiatives (see below). The academic program, according to Highland Oaks administrators, is structured to develop those fundamental skills that students will need to enjoy a satisfying and productive life.

Embodying the Coalition of Essential School principle that "less is more" and also the concept of schools-within-a-school, Highland Oaks places all students and faculty into teams. In this way, teachers get to know and follow the academic and maturational development of students more closely, and also have more opportunity to discuss student development among themselves.

Over the past 5-10 years, both the enrollment and demographics of Highland Oaks have changed significantly. Attendance has grown from 1,235 students in 1987 to 1,753 in 1997. Ethnic comparison reflects a change from 93% White students in 1987 to the present ethnic breakdown of 45% White, 27% Black, 28% Hispanic, and 2% Asian. There are a growing number of students in Highland Oaks' ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) program. There are currently 119 students in ESOL, as opposed to only around 50 in 1987. The percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch grew from 23.5 in 1992-93 to 33.1 in 1994-95, and again to 33.8 in 1996-97. The number of limited English proficient (LEP) students has also continued to grow. In 1992-93, 4.5% were LEP students, while in 1995-96, the percentage had risen to 6.1.

In the past, the school drew exclusively from the immediate, affluent middle and upper middle class neighborhood. Now, students whose families are willing to provide transportation from distant parts of vast Dade County now also attend Highland Oaks. They do so because the school maintains an excellent reputation throughout the county.

Standardized Test Scores

Norm-Referenced Achievement Tests (NRAT). This test determines how students from this school performed on a timed, multiple-choice test in relation to a national sample in the same grade. On the 1996 NRAT, grade eight reading scores for Highland Oaks averaged 51, as opposed to the Dade County school district, which averaged 34.

Florida Writing Assessment (Florida Writes! Exam). In 1996, Highland Oaks' Florida Writes! Exam average score was the same as that of the district, 3.4. In 1997, despite a continuing changing demographic, the Florida Writes! Exam average at Highland Oaks was again 3.4.

Awards, Grants, Recognitions

The Highland Oaks school, staff, and students have been the recipient of a number of awards in recent years. These include the following: 1994-95 State of Florida Principal of the Year; 1996-97 Miami Heart Youth Council; 1996-97 Prudential Student Achievement Award; 1996-97 Citibank Multicultural/Reading Program Grant; 1996-97 United Way Student Campaign Regional Champions; 1994-97 Technology Student Association District/State Winners; and 1996-97 Finalist Exceptional Student Education Administration Award.

Special Programs

Innovative programs at work at Highland Oaks include Blueprint 2000, Competency-Based Curriculum, Sunshine State Standards, Reading and Writing Across the Curriculum, Coalition of Essential Schools, Model Learning Environment, and School-to-Work Initiative.

Exceptional Children. Highland Oaks serves as a special center for exceptional children. The exceptional student program is committed to educating students who are emotionally handicapped, learning disabled, severely emotionally disturbed, autistic, visually impaired, and learning disabled gifted.

Extracurricular Remedial Classes. Remedial reading classes are held before school hours for any and all students whose reading abilities are below their own or their teachers' or parents' expectations.

Respect, Attitude, and Personal Progress for Success (RAPPS). For 25 minutes each day, all students participate in a program called RAPPS (Respect, Attitude, and Personal Progress for Success). Topics vary from drug abuse to test-taking skills to multicultural themes to community service.

Sustained Silent Reading (SSR). On two of the five days of the school week, the school runs its SSR, or Sustained Silent Reading. All students and all adults stop whatever they are doing and read.

Grand Conversations. All students are given the option of participating in Highland Oaks "Grand Conversations at Borders Books" program. (The program at Highland Oaks was started and is mainly run by one of the exemplary teachers described in this paper, Rita Gold.) It is an extracurricular activity in which students read books (which they have a say in selecting) and attend the conversations, held approximately four times a year. Students receive extra credit in their language arts classes for participating. The program regularly attracts 70-100 students, significantly more than Grand Conversations run by nearby middle schools.

Teachers Read! Readers Teach! Students are also aware that teachers have their own ongoing and highly praised book club, called "Teachers Read! Readers Teach!" Both the exemplary teachers in this paper are actively involved.

Superstars. In Highland Oaks' "Superstars" Program, students who achieve a .5 increase in their grade point average from one nine-week period to the next are honored at a special awards ceremony, at which time they are given a t-shirt, certificate, and refreshments.

SPIRIT. Finally, the SPIRIT program (Success Prepares Individuals Readily Implementing Teamwork) encourages academic and personal growth through teamwork by allowing the various teams into which students are divided to earn points for specific academic and civic endeavors. Students earn points for relevant school-related issues such as perfect attendance, participation in projects and fairs, student government fund raising activities, membership in school clubs, and community service. Each month the top teams are recognized and rewarded by the school with the assistance of local businesses.

Attendance

In 1997, Highland Oaks daily attendance average was 92.9%, as opposed to 92.5% for the district and 91.9% for the state.

Average Class Size

While the average class size for language arts classes was 25.6 in Dade County in 1997, the average size was 23.6 at Highland Oaks.

Community and Business Partnerships

The Educational Excellence Council at Highland Oaks is a group made up of administrators, faculty, parents, and business/community leaders, all of whom are considered valuable stakeholders in the educational enterprises of the community . They meet monthly to make decisions about school improvement.

The Academic Achievement Program at Highland Oaks, which sponsors a number of important activities such as the aforementioned SUPERSTARS program, brings together the school and the community, including parents and businesses. The program is funded through Highland Oaks' Parent-Teacher Association and the Aventura Marketing Council. (The Aventura Marketing Council, through their Education Committee, also provides monthly field trips for students at risk of dropping out. The program is called "Student Connections" and provides students the opportunity to listen to business leaders who speak to them about different career opportunities and increases communication and parent involvement.)

In addition to the Aventura Marketing Council, Highland Oaks has well-established business partnerships with the North Miami Beach Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce, and many businesses in the community.

Teacher Planning, Teacher Collaboration, and Professional Development Time

Highland Oaks teachers take part in daily team meetings and weekly department meetings. As a prospective member of the Coalition of Essential Schools, a peer study group called Critical Friends Group (CFG) has been formed to look critically and supportively at the work of administrators, faculty, and students.

Faculty also participate in bi-monthly in-service workshops provided by in-house staff and district level experts on particular subjects, thus allowing for the concurrent, continuing education of the entire staff. Department meetings allow for additional professional development to take place without disrupting teaching assignments and other daily schedulings. Workshops are scheduled as needed to address sensitive student-related issues. Finally, follow-up staff development workshops are scheduled periodically to enrich the faculty.

Related Materials from the Excellence in English Research Project

Research Reports

12002 *Excellence in English in Middle and High School: How Teachers' Professional Lives Support Student Achievement.* Judith A. Langer.

12014 *Beating the Odds: Teaching Middle and High School Students to Read and Write Well.* Judith A. Langer.

Case Studies

The following site-specific case studies profile teachers, teams of teachers, and central office administrators. These and others will be available beginning in spring 1999.

12003 *Interactions between Central Office Language Arts Administrators and Exemplary English Teachers, and the Impact on Student Performance.* Carla Confer.

12004 *Beating the Odds Over Time: One District's Perspective.* Sallie Snyder.

12005 *A Middle School Teacher Never Stops Learning: The Case of Cathy Starr.* Eija Rougle.

12006 *Vocational School Teacher Engages Students in High Level Reading and Writing: The Case of Janas Masztal.* Steven Ostrowski.

12008 *Collegial Support and Networks Invigorate Teaching: The Case of Marsha S. Slater.* Ester Helmar-Salasoo with Sally Kahr.

13001 *Achieving High Quality Reading and Writing in an Urban Middle School: The Case of Gail Slatko.* Tanya Manning.

13002 *How English is Taught and Learned in Four Exemplary Middle and High School Classrooms.* Steven Ostrowski.

13005 *Teaming to Teach English to International High School Students: A Case Study.* Paola Bonissone.

13008 *Collegial Networks: A Team of Sixth-Grade Teachers in a Two-Way Bilingual Program.* Gladys I. Cruz.

In addition, CELA has published a booklet, *Guidelines for Teaching Middle and High School Students to Read and Write Well.* For current availability and an up-to-date list of reports, visit the CELA website: http//cela.albany.edu or call 518-442-5026.

Please help us assess the quality of our research report series by completing and returning the questionnaire below:

NAME OF CASE STUDY: **How English is Taught and Learned in Four Exemplary Middle and High School Classrooms**

1. Your position:

____ elementary school teacher	___ state ed. agency staff	___ policy maker
____ middle school teacher	___ professional developer	___ researcher
____ high school teacher	___ school administrator	___ education writer
____ college teacher/professor	___ district administrator	other_____

2. Clarity

	Very well					Not at all
a. The concepts in this report were clearly expressed.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
b. This report was well organized.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

3. Utility

a. Reading this report gave me new information or insight into teaching or learning.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
b. This report helps the reader understand a current and important problem in education from a different perspective	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
c. I found the ideas offered in this report to be feasible given current realities of policy and practice.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

4. Any other comments or suggestions regarding this report or additional research needs in the area of English and language arts teaching and learning are greatly appreciated.

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Please return this form to: Janet Angelis, Associate Director
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